

As we move deeper into Lent, drawing closer to Holy Week, the Scriptures place reveal images we might rather avoid. This valley of dry bones, and the tomb that has been sealed for four days ask us to look honestly at death ... at loss ... at what feels finished ... at what cannot be fixed.

In the Book of Ezekiel, the prophet is carried away by the Spirit into a valley full of bones. The bones in this valley are not neatly arranged but scattered & sun-bleached. And they are not just dry but “very dry.” Read: *completely lifeless*. And in this bleak landscape, the Lord asks Ezekiel, “Mortal, can these bones live?”

It’s a strange question, but the prophet is used to strangeness. It’s Ezekiel’s specialty. And so he gives this wise answer: “*O Lord God, you know.*”

This is such a wise answer — without pretending certainty, without denying what he sees, he simply leaves the answer in God’s hands.

Having answered this gateway question, God tells Ezekiel to command “the whole house of Israel” to hear God’s word & live again. And with a rattling sound,

The toe bone connects to the foot bone. The foot bone connects to the heel bone. The heel bone connects to

the ankle bone ... And so on, upwards, until the neck bone connects to the head bone.

And after all the bones come back together, joined by fresh sinews, flesh appears. Then, finally, breath enters all the dead in the valley, to stand again as a living multitude.

That vision was first given to a people who felt like “very dry” bones. Their life had fallen apart. They showed no signs of a future. And into that stark reality, God speaks the word of promise.

And so we turn to the Gospel. Here, the scale becomes much smaller. Death is much closer, more intimate. And the stench of death is fresh.

Lazarus — someone known and loved — is dead. Martha meets Jesus with words that hold both faith and disappointment: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Mary weeps. And then, we are told, Jesus wept. He does not stand back from their grief but enters into it.

And that matters. Because it tells us that God does not avoid the places we would rather not go. God meets us there.

By this point in Lent, we have been brought to the edge of the tomb. And the truth is, most of us do not have to imagine what that feels like.

In a parish like this one, we know something about loss. We know the empty places left by people we love. We know the aching feeling of things that have changed and show no sign of returning. Some of these tombs are visible. Resting places we can visit. Some of them are tucked away. A relationship that has cooled. A hope that was frustrated. A part of life that feels closed off...

And so, in the gospel, when Jesus says, “Take away the stone,” Martha answers with uncomfortable honesty: “Lord, it’s been four days already & there is a stench.”

Martha speaks for us, & for the things we would rather leave sealed. Easier not to open them at all...

But Jesus insists. And, as he stands at the mouth of the tomb, he prays. And then he calls out, “Lazarus, come out!”

And so he does. Still wrapped in grave clothes, Lazarus emerges from the tomb — returned to life.

And this is where the story turns toward us. Because Jesus does not do everything himself. He says to those standing nearby, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

The community is drawn in. The work of new life is shared.

And that is how it’s supposed to be for us. We are called to live for one another. Not to fix everything. Not to have easy answers. But to stay close, & to help unbind — making space for life to grow where it’s been thwarted.

And so, as we near closer to Easter, we are not being asked to pretend that death is not real. But we are being invited to trust that it is not the final word. And so, for the place in your life that feels like a valley of dry bones — or like a tomb that has been sealed — you do not need to force an answer. It is enough for us to trust that God is with us, & to leave room for God to speak. The God who asks, “Can these bones live?” is the same God who enters our grief, breathing new life where none seems possible.

And so, as we wait, let us listen and keep watch — not without sorrow, but not without hope, trusting that even now, God is not finished with us. Amen.